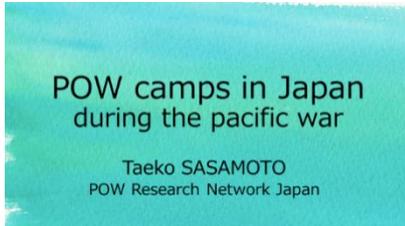


NIOD Symposium
POW Camps in Japan during the Pacific War

Taeko SASAMOTO

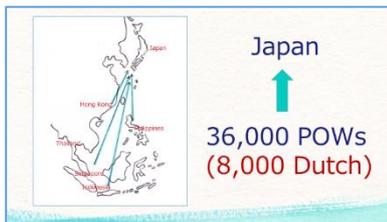


Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for that kind introduction.

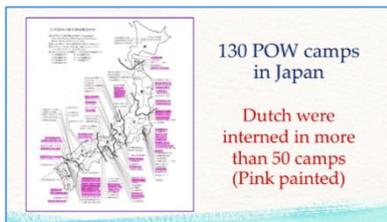
I am Taeko SASAMOTO, the Secretary of the POW Research Network Japan. For the past 20 years, I have been conducting research on the POW Camps in Japan

during the Pacific War.

At the early stage of the war, Japan took about 350,000 Allied soldiers prisoner. Of those, since the Asian POWs in occupied Southeast Asia were released after pledging allegiance to Japan, about 140,000 Caucasian prisoners were actually interned as POWs. They were forced to engage in the construction of railways, roads, and airfields in the Japanese occupied areas. As you already know, their living conditions were severe.



In those days, since adult males were sent to the front lines, Japan was suffering an acute shortage of manpower at home. In order to fill the vacancies, about 36,000 POWs were transported to the Japanese homeland. Of those, about 8,000 were Dutch.



There were 130 POW Camps established at various locations in the country, where the prisoners were forced to work at mines, shipyards, factories, and harbors. Their life in Japan was also very severe, resulting in the death of about 3,500 of them by the end of the war. Of those,

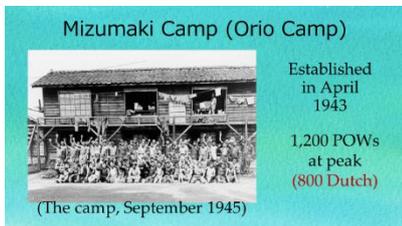
roughly 900 were Dutch.

Counting a Camp that had only one Dutch interned, Dutch POWs were held in more than 50 different Camps in the country. Some arrived in Japan from Java via Singapore, while others came after the completion of the Thailand-Burma Railway.

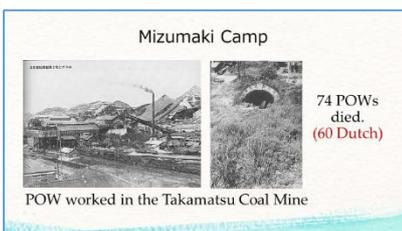
In contrast to the American, British, Australian and Canadian POWs, the Dutch POWs seemed somewhat different in status because there were many of Indonesian – and therefore, Asian – origin among them. As a result, some Japanese felt familiarity with them. A former camp guard said, “The Indonesian Dutch are gentle and mild. I often invited them to my house, asked them to help with gardening, and then shared the

harvests with them in return for their work.”

I'd like to talk now about some of the Camps in which the Dutch POWs were interned, and some episodes associated with them:



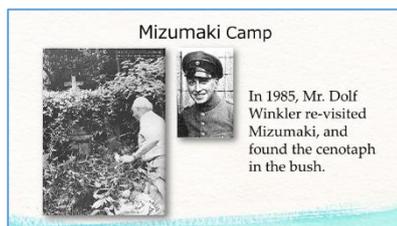
First, about Mizumaki Camp, located in Kyushu Island: This camp was also called “Orio Camp”. It opened in April 1943, with roughly 1,200 POWs interned, the majority of whom (more than 800) were Dutch.



Most of them worked in the coal mines, engaged in digging and extracting coal in the deep underground, and carrying it to the outside. As you can imagine, it was very hard work, but they were sent underground relentlessly, even if they got sick. Safety precautions were insufficient, resulting in many casualties from cave-in accidents. The living

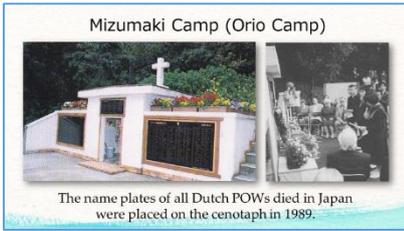
conditions of this camp were, as in other camps, severe and hard. Food and medical supplies were meager, and the POWs suffered violence from the Japanese. Consequently, 74 POWs died by the end of the war. Sixty were Dutch.

Immediately after the war, in order to give a good impression to the Occupation Forces, the Mining Company erected a small building with a cross on top for housing the ashes of these deceased POWs. However, no ashes were ever enshrined in this building. The ashes of the American and Dutch POWs were repatriated to their respective countries, and those of the British and Australian POWs were transferred to the Commonwealth War Cemetery in Yokohama. The cenotaph was left as it was, and entered a state of ruin.



In 1985, a former Dutch POW, Mr. Dolf Winkler, re-visited Mizumaki, and found the cenotaph buried in bush. He made an appeal, on behalf of his comrades who died a regrettable death far from home, asking that the cenotaph be put in good condition. Hearing this, Mr. Hiroshi Kurokawa, a local resident who recalled having seen the poor POWs in his childhood, organized “Cenotaph: The Committee to Promote Peace and Culture” in response to Winkler’s desire, and began cleaning it.





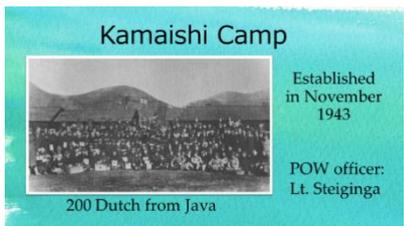
In 1987, a bronze plate inscribed with the names of Dutch POWs who died in Mizumaki was placed on the cenotaph. In 1989, similar plates with the names of all Dutch POWs who died in Japan were added, and tulips sent from school children in the Netherlands were planted around it.



School children and older students in Mizumaki began cleaning up the cenotaph, and learning the history of the POW Camp in their town. Furthermore, the students of Mizumaki and those of Noordoostpolder, where Winkler lived, began a student-exchange program, visiting each

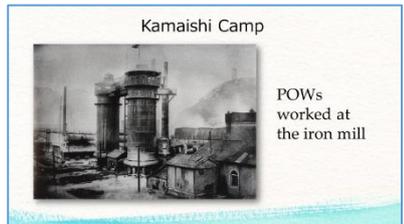
other's towns for a home-stay.

When the Dutch war victims are invited to Japan by the Japanese Government every year, they invariably visit Mizumaki, and enjoy getting together with the local people.



Next, I'll tell about Kamaishi Camp, on Japan's northeast coast. This is a story about a former POW Camp commandant tried as a war criminal, and his granddaughter. This camp was established in November 1943, and interned 200 Dutch POWs from Java. The senior Dutch officer was

First Lieutenant Steinginga.

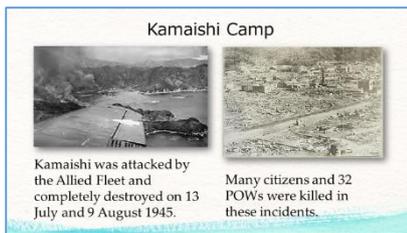


The POWs worked at the steel blast furnace, and were also engaged in loading ore and limestone, operating lathes, welding, and repairing machinery. In less than 3 months from their arrival, 16 POWs died. The cause of death was mostly pneumonia. They were weakened when they arrived,

and had difficulty adjusting to the cold weather in northern Japan after their transport from tropical Java. Under the first Japanese Camp Commandant, food and medication were insufficient for their recovery.

The second Camp Commandant, Second Lieutenant Makoto Inaki, attempted to let the POWs have as much nourishing food as possible, and strictly forbade his subordinates to use violence on the POWs. In consequence, they gradually regained their health, and their recorded weight was the highest of all POW camps in northern Japan. Lieutenant Steinginga gave praise, saying "Kamaishi is the best camp in Japan."

As 1945 began, air raids against large cities in Japan intensified, and in May, about 200



POWs were evacuated from the Tokyo-Yokohama metropolitan area to Kamaishi. However, on 14 July and 9 August, U.S. and British Task Forces appeared off Kamaishi, and battle ships rained their 16-inch guns' shells on the city. Kamaishi was completely destroyed, and many of its citizens were killed. The POW Camp located near the seashore was also totally destroyed, and 32 POWs were killed.

After the war, Commandant Inaki was tried as a war criminal and sentenced to 7 years of hard labor on a charge of mistreatment of the POWs. While serving his sentence, he was subject to pent-up anger, believing that he had tried to treat the POWs as fairly as he could. After his release from prison, he became a newspaper reporter, and wrote books on his unhappy experiences.



One day, 30 years after the war, a letter from Mr. van der Hoek, a former Dutch POW, was delivered to Kamaishi City Office, and redirected to Inaki. It read, "We were well treated at Kamaishi, and the local people were kind to us." For Inaki, it had the effect of a divine revelation, and relieved him from long years of mental depression. For roughly 10 years thereafter, Inaki and van der Hoek corresponded with each other until their deaths.

Ms. Satoko Kogure, Inaki's granddaughter, was quite shocked when she read her grandfather's book in her high school days. He did his best for the POWs. Nonetheless, he was tried as a war criminal. Why? Weren't the Allies in violation of the Geneva Convention, shelling Kamaishi indiscriminately? What on earth was the war for? In order to study about those matters, she enrolled in a university's Faculty of Law, and began researching the Kamaishi Camp.



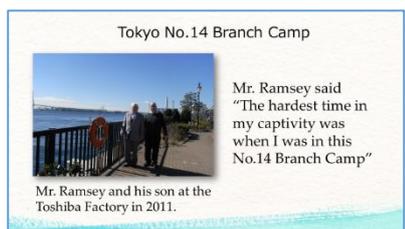
When she contacted me through a third person, I asked her to join our Network, and visited America with her to attend a General Assembly of former POWs. She read books on the experiences the POWs had undergone, and by empathizing with them, she realized that it was an undeniable fact that

Japan had mistreated the Allied prisoners. She also realized that not only the POWs, but her grandfather, was a victim of the war in a sense, and she determined that there should be no more war in the future. Satoko now works as an editor for *Newsweek* magazine, and writes about issues of war and peace. A few years ago, she visited the

bereaved family of van der Hoek in the Netherlands, as well as a former US POW she came to know. She was warmly welcomed.

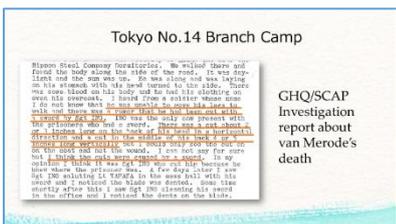


The next Camp is Tokyo No. 14 Branch Camp, located in the industrial area near Tokyo. It opened toward the end of December 1943, with a total of about 200 Dutch, British, Australian, and American POWs, who were interned as workers at Toshiba electric factory.



The life in this camp was indescribably severe. Mr. Ramsey, a former Australian POW, survived the construction of the notorious Thailand-Burma Railway and the sinking of a hell ship on his way to Japan. When he visited Japan a few years ago, he said the hardest time in his captivity was at this Tokyo No. 14 Branch Camp.

The camp's location changed 4 times during the war. Of the 4 times, two were caused by the camp's being burned to the ground by air raids. In the first air raid, in April 1945,



van Merode, a Dutch POW, was killed. According to the death record prepared by the Japanese Military, the cause of his death was "killed by bombing." However, postwar investigation by the Allied Forces revealed that a Japanese Army sergeant killed him with a sword in the bustle and confusion of an air raid. As van Merode was disabled, he

might have been a drag on others during evacuation.

The third Camp was built within the enclosure of the Toshiba factory. But it was also burned down by an air raid on 13 July 1945, and as many as 29 POWs were killed. Of these, 22 were Dutch.



The fourth Camp was built in the middle of a residential area toward the end of July. In the house next to the Camp, there lived a 16-year old girl by the name of Yoko. Every day she practiced the piano, as she wanted to enroll in a music school. One day, as she chanced to look outside through a window of her room, she saw a POW on the roof, listening to her play. From the following day on, the number of POWs on the roof increased to 2, 3, 4 ... and finally about to 20

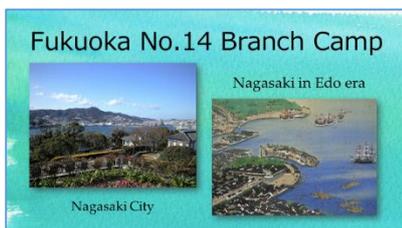
altogether. Soon, the war was over, and B-29s flew over the Camp, dropping relief supplies.

Then on 30 August, the day came for the POWs to go home. About 20 POWs visited Yoko's house with bags on their shoulders. "Thank you for playing the piano. Our spiritual thirst was very much relieved." So saying, they handed bags to Yoko. There were canned goods, cigarettes, sugar, chocolate bars, and so on; precious gifts the Japanese could not afford in those days. After enjoying the tea that Yoko's parents served, the POWs rode on a bus that came to pick them up, and were gone waving their hands.



On Yoko's notebook, some POWs wrote down their names and addresses. Three years ago, Yoko asked a newspaper in England to search for their whereabouts. Two of the POWs' bereaved families were found. She has been in correspondence with one of the families since.

Today, in Yoko's house, the piano she played to relieve the POWs' spiritual thirst still keeps a sweet timbre.

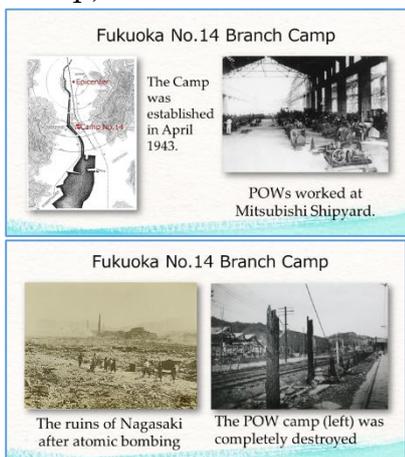


Nagasaki is located on the island of Kyushu, and had close ties with the Netherlands. During the period of national isolation between the 17th and 19th centuries, for the Japanese, the Netherlands was the only country permitted to trade thru Dejima in Nagasaki. So we were connected, thru Nagasaki, to the Netherlands, and then to the world

in those days.

During the war, there were 2 POW camps in Nagasaki. One was Fukuoka No. 2 Branch Camp, in the suburbs of the city, and another was Fukuoka No. 14 Branch Camp, located

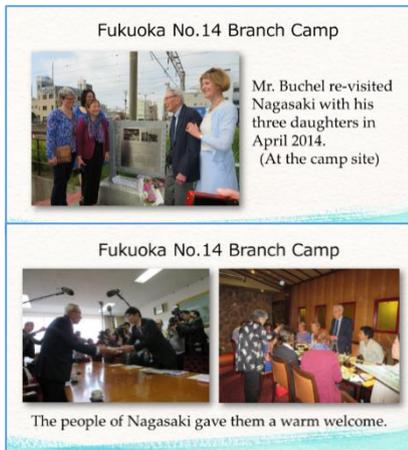
near ground zero of the atomic blast. The Dutch POWs had a majority in both camps.



No. 14 Branch Camp was opened in April 1943, and had 500 POWs interned at its peak. They worked at Mitsubishi Shipyard, and over 100 of them died from illness and in accidents.

In addition, on 9 August 1945, 8 more POWs were killed by the atomic bombing. Of those, 7 were Dutch.

Those who barely survived the disaster must have suffered various aftereffects from radiation exposure after the war. The Japanese Government issued the “Medical treatment note for A-bomb victims” to some survivors. However, since the surviving POWs lived abroad, they could not receive any substantial medical support.



In 2014, a resident of Waalre, Mr. Willy Buchel, was issued the Medical treatment note.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, he visited Nagasaki with his three daughters.

The people of Nagasaki gave them a big warm welcome, with full support from our Network.

After receiving the note, Buchel took legal proceedings against the Japanese Government for his right to seek compensation denied him because he was a resident abroad. Mr. Buchel did not seek this for monetary reasons, but to improve the rights of all A-bomb victims living abroad.

In March this year, the two parties reached a settlement, and the compensation was paid to him. This was the very first time that compensation was paid to a former POW: an epochal event. He decided to donate the money to the pacifist groups in Japan, and kindly added our Network to his list as one of them. We were deeply moved and appreciative of his kindness, considering the fact that he has undergone the indescribable hardships of POW and A-bomb victim.

As for Fukuoka No. 2 Branch Camp, Mrs. Tamura has already talked about it, so I will now conclude my speech.

As you can easily imagine, each of the 130 POW camps that once existed in Japan has its own hidden truths of history. I would very much like to unearth them, and hand them down to the next generation. Thank you all for your time, and I hope that you better understand the wartime POW camps in Japan.